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DAWN

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Kite flying to remain banned in Lahore parks over Basant

• City admin to monitor festival using drones, safe city cameras for compliance • Nearly 2,500 kite sellers, traders and associations apply for registration

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) has imposed a ban on kite flying in public parks and greenbelts on Basant, as the Lahore administration decided to digitally monitor the three-day festival, starting Feb 6, to ensure compliance.

PHA Managing Director Raja Mansoor Ahmad said the decision was made to ensure that kite flying and related celebrations did not harm trees and other park infrastructure.

"Since the Basant festival is being held for three days in Lahore alone, the arrival of a number of people from other cities of Punjab, other provinces and abroad is expected here for kite flying and other related activities.

In such a situation, the people may rush for the public parks and green areas for kite flying and other related celebrations…" he told *Dawn*.

He said the decision was made to prevent any untoward incident, including damage to the plants, greenbelts and other infrastructure.

"Lahore, in addition to its huge number of permanent residents, may also have a considerable number of people from other cities and countries starting from the Feb 4 evening, since Feb 5 is also a public holiday (Youm-i-Kashmir)," he added.

"The parks would remain open to the people, but they wouldn't be allowed for kite flying," he said, adding that the PHA enforcement staff has been put on high alert.

According to an official notification by the PHA, the directors concerned have been asked to ensure strict implementation of the ban within their respective zones.

The authority emphasised that any violation of these instructions will be considered unacceptable, and in case of any damage or untoward incident, the respective director would be held responsible.

Digital monitoring

Meanwhile, the city district administration said that strict digital monitoring of Basant would be carried out through drone cameras and the Lahore Safe City Authority's cameras. A control room would be set up at the DC office.

It was revealed in a meeting presided over by Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Ali Ijaz.

"Kite flying will only be allowed from Feb 6 to 8, whereas the material will be sold through registered dealers alone," the DC said while speaking on the occasion.

He said that kites bigger than the approved sizes will be prohibited. Moreover, none of the bikers would be allowed to drive without safety wires. Basant would only be allowed at specific grounds or notified rooftops, including in the Walled City or other locations across the district.

Registration of kite manufacturers

On the other hand, as many as 2,437 kite manufacturers, sellers, traders and associations have applied for registration with the city administration for the festival.

According to a document seen by *Dawn*, as many as 1,334 kite sellers applied for registration till Jan 22, 2026. Out of this, 161 applications were currently in process, whereas 1,107 had been approved.

A total of 838 kite manufacturers applied for registration, 697 applications had been approved, whereas 85 were in process. However, 51 applications were rejected.

Similarly, 250 kite traders applied for registration, out of which 19 applications were in process and 223 had been approved. Eight applications were rejected.

Moreover, 18 kite flying associations applied for registration, of which 12 were approved, two are in process, while four applications were rejected.

It is pertinent to mention that the provincial government decided in December last year to celebrate a limited Basant in Lahore with strict conditions.

COMMUTERS drive through a snow-covered road near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Chaman.—AFP

CM reviews performance of provincial departments

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti on Thursday chaired a review meeting to assess the six-month performance of provincial departments and the progress of ongoing development projects, directing officials to ensure the timely completion of all public welfare schemes.

The meeting was attended by provincial minister Raheela Hameed Durrani, Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, and secretaries of the departments concerned.

The chief minister was presented with a comprehensive report on departmental performance over the past six months, along with an update on the status of development projects.

Chief Minister Bugti directed all departments to ensure staff attendance and take full ownership of their respective development projects.

He also instructed departments to establish effective mechanisms for the early resolution of public complaints. He asked the law department to submit a draft of the provincial contract policy within two weeks.

He directed that 100 per cent merit be ensured in contractual recruitments in the education department, warning that FIRs would be registered against individuals holding fake degrees.

The meeting was briefed on reports regarding six-monthly open courts held across the province. Chief Minister Bugti instructed that summaries related to public interest be taken up on a priority basis and directed that the complaint cell be fully activated and widely publicised among the public.

In recognition of performance, the chief minister distributed certificates of appreciation to departmental secretaries whose departments ranked among the top 10 performers in the six-monthly departmental ranking.

Officials also briefed the meeting on progress in departmental development projects.

Heavy snowfall hinders routine life across Balochistan

• Power outages, gas shortages hit residents hard amid freezing temperature
• Several roads blocked; machinery deployed; public urged to stay home

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Heavy downpour and snowfall blanketed the Quetta valley and vast parts of northern and central Balochistan on Thursday, ending a long dry spell but paralysing normal life.

The severe weather blocked major highways, cutting off the provincial capital, while lashing Siberian winds caused temperatures to plummet across the region.

Authorities reported that six members of a family were injured when their vehicle skidded off the Quetta-Karachi national highway in the Surab area of Kalat district due to freezing snow. The injured were shifted to a district hospital.

Consequently, officials suspended traffic on various highways connecting Balochistan with other provinces and linking remote districts to Quetta, citing dangerous, slippery conditions caused by high-speed icy winds.

The extreme weather affected more than just transportation. Cities and towns connected to the Sui Southern Gas Company, including Quetta, suffered long power breakouts and low gas pressure.

These utility failures caused significant hardship for residents facing freezing temperatures, which were recorded between minus 8 and minus 12 degrees Celsius in Quetta, Ziarat, Kalat, Mastung, Kan Mehtarzai, Khanozai, Muslim Bagh, Qila Abdullah, Sanjavi and many other cities.

The Met Office forecast more rain and snowfall in the next 24 hours due to Siberian winds, which have also frozen large areas in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, residents witnessed Quetta wearing a "white blanket" for the first time in at least five years. The last heavy snowfall occurred in 2020, when the capital received 3 feet of snow and northern parts saw up to 6 feet, leaving the province cut off for days.

Mountains surrounding the valley, including Hanna Lake and Urak Valley, turned white, prompting locals to flock to these areas to enjoy the season's first snow.

The other areas of the province that received snowfall and rain included Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Ziarat, Qila Saifullah, Muslim Bagh, Khanozai, Kan Mehtarzai, Chaman, Toba Achakzai, Mastung, Kalat, Harboi, Surab, Toba Kakari, Sanjavi, Duki and other areas.

According to sources, Ziarat, Khanozai, Muslim Bagh, Kalat, Toba Achakzai and Toba Kakari received two to three feet of snow.

Traffic on the highway from Balochistan to D.I. Khan and Islamabad via Zhob was suspended due to snow. The Khojak Pass to Afghanistan via Chaman was also closed to prevent accidents. Authorities worked to clear highways and spread salt to melt ice. The public was advised to avoid unnecessary travel as heavy machinery helped restore traffic.

State can't be blamed for 'self-imposed disappearance', says Bugti

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: The Balochistan government has taken "serious steps" to resolve the missing persons issue and enacted laws to punish the guilty, Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti said on Thursday.

"The state should no longer be held responsible for cases of self-imposed disappearance," Sarfraz Bugti said during a meeting on the matter.

He said the issue had now been addressed through legal means, adding that if anyone chooses to go into hiding on their own, responsibility cannot be attributed to the state.

Mr Bugti stressed that names of individuals who voluntarily associate with 'militant' or 'separatist' organisations should not be classified as "cases of enforced disappearance".

"Unfortunately, state institutions have repeatedly been maligned in the past, but such narratives must no longer be used as a tool for propaganda," the chief minister said.

Mr Bugti recalled that the United Nations had spelt out a "clearly defined mechanism" regarding missing persons, emphasising that the provincial government respected internationally recognised procedures and legal frameworks on the matter.

"The government of Balochistan remains committed to transparency, rule of law, and addressing legitimate concerns through constitutional and legal channels," he said.

A day earlier, Mr Bugti said security forces in Balochistan often conducted intelligence-based operations where suspects were detained for investigation.

However, he added, the new legal framework would ensure transparency and accountability.

PBC amends rules to ban fresh affiliation of law colleges

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: Expressing concern over the mushroom growth of law colleges and the continuous decline in the standard and quality of legal education in the country, the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) has amended its legal education rules to prohibit the further affiliation of any law colleges for the next three years.

Through a letter issued to all the registrars, university/degree-awarding institutions competent to affiliate law colleges across the country, as well as chairmen of affiliation committees, the PBC informed that it has substituted Rule 20 of the Pakistan Bar Council Legal Education Rules, 2015.

The substituted Rule 20 deals with the ban on fresh affiliation of law colleges and states: "The affiliation of law colleges is prohibited for three years, with effect from January 15, 2026. Accordingly, no Pakistani university/degree awarding institution recognised by the Pakistan Bar Council shall affiliate any law college during this period. Any university or institution found in violation of this restriction shall be liable to be derecognised."

Earlier, Rule 20 stated: "No university or degree-awarding institution recognised by the Council shall affiliate any law college after enforcement of the Rules, and in case of violation, the concerned university/institution shall be liable to be derecognised after affording an opportunity of hearing."

The letter, which was issued on January 20, clarified that applications received by the PBC before January 15, 2026 would be processed, but no fresh applications would be entertained thereafter.

"The decision will have no effect on public universities or the chartered universities established through legislation by the national or provincial assemblies," said newly elected PBC vice chairman Pir Muhammad Masood Chishti while talking to *Dawn*.

He regretted that the Punjab University alone had awarded affiliation to over 90 law colleges, despite many of these institutions lacking proper faculty, suitable buildings, and adequate law libraries. According to PBC rules, any institution imparting a law degree must have a library containing at least 5,000 standard law books.

Joint session today to take up bills returned by president

PML-N leader says PPP reservations addressed; PTI declares opposition will contest proposed legislation

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has summoned a joint session of parliament today, which is likely to take up three crucial bills that had been returned by the president without signature.

A statement by the Presidency said that the joint sitting will convene at 11am on Friday. Besides a bill pertaining to the establishment of the Daanish University, two proposed laws regarding domestic violence and human rights will also be tabled in the house.

President Zardari, who is a top leader of the PPP, returned these bills last month despite their passage by the Senate and the National Assembly.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry told *Dawn* that the PPP's concerns had been addressed by the government. He hoped all three bills would be cleared in the joint session. The PML-N leader said that he and Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar had met a PPP delegation, comprising Sherry Rehman, Naveed Qamar, and Farooq H. Naek, to assure the ruling partner that the proposed legislation would not impact the 18th Amendment, which had devolved education to provinces.

"We have informed the PPP lawmakers that the Daanish Schools scheme is a flagship project of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif under which community schools and education institutions are being established in all four provinces... Besides, these educational institutions are also being set up in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir," he added. The minister said a separate meeting was held with the leaders of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, in which the PML-N also addressed their concerns.

According to Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, the government has already taken other allied parties into confidence on the matter and all three bills will be passed in the joint sitting.

PPP leader Sharmila Farooqui, however, said that the government could not table the same university bill that was rejected by President Zardari. She said her party expected that the new bill would address the concerns expressed by the PPP. "We believe that education is purely a provincial subject and the Centre should not interfere in it," she added.

PTI chief whip in the National Assembly, Amir Dogar, said the opposition would oppose all three bills in the joint sitting.

President approves judges' confirmation

Separately, President Zardari approved the confirmation of 27 additional judges of the Sindh, Lahore, and Peshawar high courts.

For the Sindh High Court (SHC), the statement said the president had approved the confirmation of all 10 additional judges recommended by the JCP.

President Zardari also approved a six-month extension in the tenures of Justices Khalid Hussain Shahani and Syed Faizul Hassan Shah of the SHC, the statement added.

For the Lahore High Court (LHC), President Zardari confirmed all 11 additional judges recommended by the JCP. He also approved a six-month extension in the tenure of Justice Tariq Mahmood Bajwa as an additional LHC judge, according to the statement.

For the Peshawar High Court (PHC), he approved the confirmation of six additional judges. He also approved a six-month extension in the tenure of Justices Farah Jamshed, Inamullah Khan, Sabitullah Khan and Aurangzeb as PHC's additional judges.

AJK warns of tariff review amid surge in electricity use

Energy secretary says increased consumption pushing distribution network to its limits

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government has warned that failure to ensure responsible use of electricity could force a review of the region's existing highly subsidised power tariffs, which may then be determined strictly on demand-and-supply principles.

In a public message addressed to electricity consumers, AJK's secretary for energy resources Chaudhry Muhammad Tayyab said the government had, in response to public demand, substantially reduced electricity rates for both domestic and commercial users.

"This extraordinary reduction in tariffs has resulted in an equally extraordinary increase in electricity consumption," he said, adding that the resulting pressure on the system had pushed the power distribution network to its limits.

He explained that electricity demand peaked during winter in Muzaffarabad and Poonch divisions and during summer in Mirpur division, mainly due to extensive use of electric heaters, geysers and, most notably, electric cooking stoves in winter, and the unchecked use of air-conditioners in summer.

"As a result, the power distribution system comes under intense pressure, making transformer burnouts and breakdowns a routine occurrence, which ultimately causes hardship for consumers," Mr Tayyab said, describing the situation as highly unpleasant for the electricity department.

He said engineers and technicians were working round the clock, repairing damaged transformers and striving to keep the power supply running or to restore it at the earliest. Despite limited resources, he added, the AJK government was making every possible effort to stabilise the distribution network, with valuable assistance from the federal government.

However, Mr Tayyab stressed that meaningful improvement in the prevailing situation was impossible without public cooperation, urging consumers to avoid unnecessary and excessive use of electricity, pay their bills on time, and clear all outstanding dues.

He specifically appealed to people to refrain from using electric stoves for cooking, exercise restraint in the use of air-conditioners, and limit the use of inverter ACs for heating during winter, particularly by switching them off before going to sleep. He also called on households to avoid installing unnecessary decorative outdoor lights and searchlights.

Highlighting the issue of electricity theft, Mr Tayyab urged citizens to identify and report those involved, assuring that the identity of informants would be kept confidential. He said a dedicated helpline for reporting power theft would be announced soon, and advised consumers to immediately contact the nearest electricity department office in case of missing or faulty meters.

The continued "irresponsible use of low-cost electricity", he warned, would further worsen the situation.

"In such a situation, the government will be compelled to review the current highly subsidised tariffs and determine electricity prices strictly in accordance with demand and supply principles," he added.